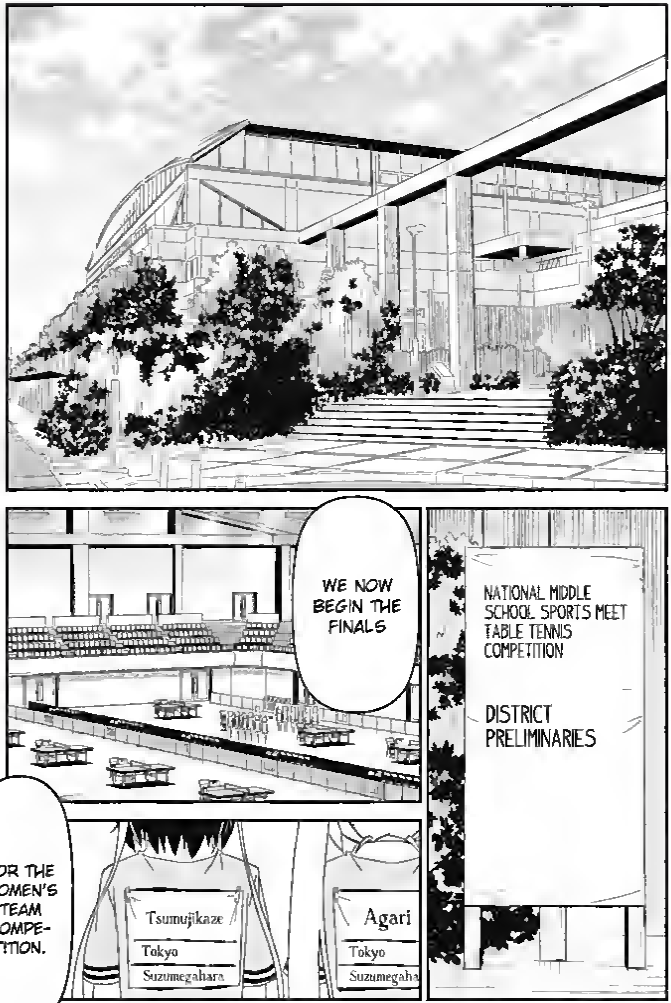
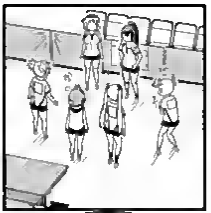
CHAPTER 8 『THE BEST FRIEND IN THE WORLD ①』

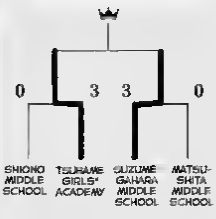
PROFESSOR WANKO


NATIONAL MIDDLE SCHOOL SPORTS MEET TABLE TENNIS COMPETITION
DISTRICT PRELIMINARIES
WE NOW BEGIN THE FINALS
FOR THE WOMEN'S TEAM COMPE-TITION.
Tsumujikaze
Tokyo
Suzumegahara
Agari
Tokyo
Suzumegaha

SUZUME-GAHARA MIDDLE SCHOOL VERSUS
TSUBAME GIRLS' ACADEMY.
PLEASED TO MEET YOU!!



FINALS



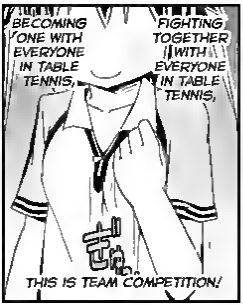
LEAGUE

	SUZUME-GAHARA	HIKARI	TAKARA
SUZUME GAHARA		3 – 0	3 – 0
HIKARI	0 – 3		1 – 3
TAKARA	0 – 3	3 – 1	

0
3
3
SHIONO MIDDLE SCHOOL
TSUBAME GIRLS' ACADEMY
SUZUME-GAHARA MIDDLE SCHOOL
YOU COULD SAY OUR PERFORMANCE HAS BEEN MORE OR LESS THE SAME.
BUT TSUBAME GOT TO THE FINALS COMPLETELY UNDEFEATED TOO.
LAST TIME, KIRUKA'S ABSENCE TOOK ITS TOLL ON US AND WE LOST TO TSUBAME.
BUT TO-DAY
WE REPAY THAT DEBT!
RIGHT, EVERY-ONE?!
はいぃ..!
YES!

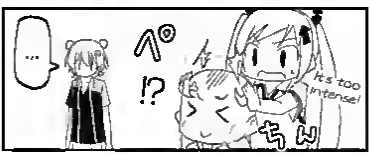
LET'S BEAT THEM AND GET FIRST PLACE!
ぷぃ〜ん
WE'LL ADVANCE TO THE TOKYO TOURNAMENT
IN THE BEST POSSIBLE FORM!
PUT YOUR HEARTS TOGETHER! SUZUMEGAHARA.
FIGHT!

MY HEART WON'T STOP POUNDING!
CALM DOWN. PUT A BRAKE ON THOSE PIGTAILS, KOYORI


BECOMING ONE WITH EVERYONE IN TABLE TENNIS,
FIGHTING TOGETHER WITH EVERYONE IN TABLE TENNIS,
THIS IS TEAM COMPETITION!

WE ENDED UP FACING SUZUMEGAHARA AFTER ALL...
A-CHAN...

yawn


...
ペロ
!?
It's too intense!
ちゅ

TSUMUJIKAZE... KOYORI...

WH-WHAT'S THAT? THAT'S A LINE I CAN'T FORGIVE!
And it's Irori-sensei!
BUT ALL THE MATCHES SO FAR MADE ME SO SLEEPY
WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THERE ARE THINGS IN THIS WORLD EVEN MORE BORING THAN PRACTICE WITH LOLI-SENPAI?
GET SOME FIGHTING SPIRIT IN THERE, YOU'RE GOING FIRST IN THE SINGLES!
THAT'S A BIG YAWN!
ISN'T THAT RIGHT, NEMURI-SAN?
IF HER OPPONENT IS SKILLED ENOUGH, IT'LL FORCE HER TO WAKE UP
IT'S FINE, IRORI-SAN
WELL,
IT'S TIME FOR ME TO GO.
GRR! YOU'RE TOO SOFT, KOHIME!
ONLY BY BEING DILIGENT AT ALL TIMES CAN ONE DRAW OUT THEIR TRUE STRENGTH!
AS EXPECTED, CAPTAIN KOHIME UNDERSTANDS

SO CUTE ♡
KEEP AN EYE ON TORATAROU FOR ME, LOLI-SENPAI.
Ahem!
LEAVE IT TO ME!
I am your senpai after all.
I-I DIDN'T WANT IT ANYWAY!
I'M NOT GIVING IT TO YOU
SINGLES 1.
0 0 0 0
WE NOW COMMENCE THE FIRST MATCH.
UYHOO! LEAVE IT TO ME!
KEEP IT TOGE-THER!
HANA-CHAN!
DO YOUR BEST!
Uhyoo!
GIVE US A NICE VICTORY TO BOOST UP EVERYBODY'S SPIRITS!
YOU'RE UP FIRST, HANABI!
YEAAH.
FIGHT!
Nemuri
GO FOR IT!
DO YOUR BEST, NEMURI!

LET'S HAVE A NICE MATCH!
NICE MATCH
SQUEEZE
LET'S GO!
FIRST MATCH, SINGLES 1
TENKA HANABI (SUZUMEGAHARA MIDDLE SCHOOL)
VS
SAKIGAKE NEMURI (TSUBAME GIRLS' ACADEMY)
LOVE-ALL.

(HANABI)
1 - 0
(NEMURI)
WHA-
SO FAST!
MY BEST FRIEND IN THE WORLD!
MY FRIEND!
EVERYONE!
I'LL WIN NO MATTER WHAT,
HOKUTO!
WATCH ME CLOSELY,

YOU'RE STAYING IN BED TODAY.
37.5 DEGREES.
37.5
HM~
THAT'S BORING! WHY CAN'T I EVER PLAY OUT SIDE?!
SOCCER! SOFT-BALL! DODGE-BALL!
YOU CAN'T! YOU HAVE A FEVER!
BUT YOU DON'T LET ME PLAY EVEN WHEN I DON'T HAVE A FEVER! YOU'RE TOO PROTECTIVE MOM!
I'M JUST WORRIED ABOUT YOU!
I WAS BORN WITH A WEAK BODY AND WAS ALWAYS SICK.
HM~!
BECAUSE OF THAT, I WASN'T ALLOWED TO PLAY ANY SPORTS.
TENKA HANABI
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL 5TH YEAR

BUT ...
...
WELL THEN...
WHAT ABOUT TABLE TENNIS?
TABLE TENNIS?
YEAH, MY FRIEND'S FAMILY RUNS A TABLE TENNIS SHOP
THEY GIVE TABLE TENNIS LESSONS TOO AND THEY LET ME PLAY THERE. IT'S SUPER FUN!
SO THAT'S WHY YOU'VE BEEN COMING HOME SO LATE
SORRY ...
TABLE TENNIS, HUH?
WELL, IT'S AN INDOORS SPORT, IT SEEMS TO BE COMPLETELY SAFE TOO, AND IT LOOKS LIKE PRETTY LIGHT EXERCISE.
むむ...
Uhyoo!
YAY!
ALRIGHT, TABLE TENNIS IS OKAY.
TABLE TENNIS WAS THE ONLY THING ALLOWED FOR ME.
SO SHE GAVE YOU PERMISSION TO PLAY TABLE TENNIS
THAT'S RIGHT.
うさ耳卓球
うさ耳卓球
YEAH!

FOOL-ISH?!
THAT WAS PRETTY FOOLISH OF HER TO MISTAKE TABLE TENNIS FOR A "LIGHT EXERCISE".
BUT ...
NOW WE CAN PLAY TABLE TENNIS TOGETHER WHENEVER WE WANT, HOKUTO!
NO! IF YOU DO THAT, I WON'T BE ABLE TO PLAY ANYMORE!
AS THE DAUGHTER OF A TABLE TENNIS SHOP OWNER, I CAN'T LET THIS PASS
LOOKS LIKE YOUR MOTHER NEEDS A LITTLE ONE-HOUR LECTURE ON THE SEVERITY OF TABLE TENNIS.
THERE'S A SPORT EVEN I CAN DO!
IF IT'S TABLE TENNIS I CAN DO IT!
I WAS GETTING MORE AND MORE DRAWN INTO IT!
I WAS SO HAPPY, I SPENT EVERY DAY DOING NOTHING BUT PLAY-ING TABLE TENNIS WITH HOKUTO,
ALL WHILE HELPING AT HER STORE...

DON'T FORCE YOURSELF TOO MUCH. TABLE TENNIS IS AN INTENSE SPORT AFTER ALL.
If you make light of it you'll get hurt
IT'S FINE, IT'S FINE!
BUT...
37.4
I TOLD YOU...
HMM ~!
...
EVEN AFTER I STARTED TO PLAY, THERE WERE STILL DAYS WHEN I HAD TO STAY IN BED.
CHIL-DREN'S TABLE TENNIS COMPE-TITION?
I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE MORE FUN THAN JUST PLAYING AT OUR SHOP.
PLUS, WE CAN PUT OUR EVERYDAY TRAINING TO THE TEST
子ども卓球大会

SO THE TWO OF US ARE COMPETING TOGETHER! I CAN'T WAIT FOR IT, HOKUTO!
I'M GOING! I'M GOING I'M GOING I'M DEFINITELY GOING!
Uhyoo!
IT'S GOING TO BE AT THE FIRST DAY OF THE CONSECUTIVE HOLIDAYS NEXT WEEK. WANT TO GO TOGETHER?
YEAH, TOGETHER!
うさ耳卓球
HA HAA
IT'S FINE, IT'S FINE!
DON'T FORCE YOURSELF.
ALL RIGHT! WE HAVE TO UP OUR GAME BEFORE THE COMPETITION! TIME FOR SOME SPECIAL TRAINING!
ONE MORE TIME!
NO WAY!
HANABI, IT'S ABOUT TIME WE SHOULD STOP
THE COMPETITION IS TOMORROW!
IF I'M GOING, I WANT TO GET FIRST PLACE. I'M GONNA PRACTICE UNTIL I'M CONFIDENT!

...
I WANT TO BE ABLE TO DO IT PROPERLY!
AND THAT THING YOU TAUGHT ME...
MY FIRST COMPETITION! IF I'M DOING THIS, I WANNA WIN! I WANT TO PLAY AGAINST A LOT OF DIFFERENT PEOPLE!
I'LL TAKE EVERYTHING I'VE LEARNED,
AND THROW MY FULL STRENGTH AT THEM!
YOU'RE RESTING TODAY.
38.2
HAH.. HAA...
COM-PET...

COMPE-
TITION!
TABLE
TENNIS!
THERE'S
NO WAY
YOU'RE
GOING!
IT'S
YOUR OWN
FAULT FOR
PUSHING
YOURSELF
THAT MUCH
YESTER-
DAY!
NO!
NO!
NOOOOOOO.....
HANABI,
HOKUTO-CHAN
CAME TO
SEE YOU
17:16
RIGHT
AT THE
DAY OF
...
THE
COMPE-
TITION
...
I'M
SORRY...
WHY?
I TRIED
SO HARD. I
PRACTICED
SO MUCH.

WHY DO I HAVE TO BE STUCK IN BED?!
WHY DID I HAVE TO GET A FEVER AT A TIME LIKE THIS?!
I WAS REALLY REALLY LOOKING FORWARD TO THE COMPE-TITION!
WHY?
IT'S ALWAYS LIKE THIS, MY HEALTH GOES BAD AT THE MOST IMPORTANT TIMES AND I MISS ALL OF THE FUN.
NO TRIPS, NO SPORTS EVENTS...
...
IT'S A SHAME YOU COULDN'T JOIN THE COMPE-TITION, BUT...
NEXT TIME.
IT'S FINE.

IT DOESN'T MATTER.
I'M QUITTING TABLE TENNIS.
DID YOU START TO HATE IT?
I LOVE IT! I LOVE IT, BUT IF TRYING THIS HARD IS NOT GOING TO PAY OFF
IF IT'S GOING TO BE LIKE THIS, THERE'S NO POINT!
YOU HAVE IT NICE, HAVING FUN AT THE COMPETITION ALL BY YOURSELF,
EVEN THOUGH YOU SAID WE'D GO TOGETHER.
YOU TRAI-TOR!

I BROUGHT YOU THIS GET WELL GIFT. I'LL LEAVE IT HERE.
?
I'M GOING HOME.
...
...
FOR ME...
EVERY-THING IS BORING WHEN YOU'RE NOT AROUND ...
SO GET WELL SOON, OKAY?
WAH! HOKUTO CHAN!?
THANK YOU FOR HAVING ME.
EH? YOU'RE LEAVING ALREADY?

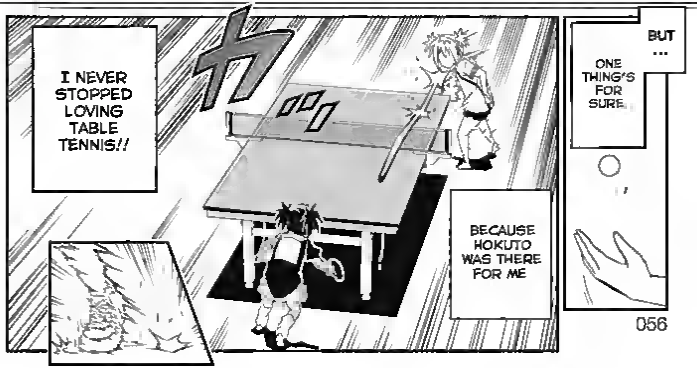
...
This kid...
OH, IS THIS AN AMULET FROM THE SUZUME-GAHARA SHRINE?
WHAT DID YOU SAY?! IS THAT ANY WAY TO TALK ABOUT YOUR FRIEND WHO CAME BECAUSE SHE WAS WORRIED ABOUT YOU?
WHO CARES ABOUT HER?
DID SOMETHING HAPPEN WITH HOKUTO-CHAN?
YEAH, AND NOT ONLY THAT,
AMU-LET?
御守
TO GET THIS ONE YOU NEED TO VISIT THE SHRINE ONE HUNDRED TIMES.
IT'S A VERY VALUABLE CHARM.

IT'S THE KIND OF PILGRIMAGE WHERE YOU VISIT A SHRINE A HUNDRED TIMES TO GET YOUR WISH HEARD
ONE HUNDRED VISITS?
...
はっ
YOU HAVE IT NICE, HAVING FUN AT THE COMPETITION ALL BY YOURSELF
HOKUTO... YOU DID THIS A HUNDRED TIMES JUST FOR ME?
JUST HOW MUCH TIME DID IT TAKE?
ポタ
ポタ
ポタ
I...
AND DESPITE THAT I...
I...!
SQUEEZE
CAN IT BE THAT SHE DIDN'T GO TO THE COMPETITION FOR THIS?

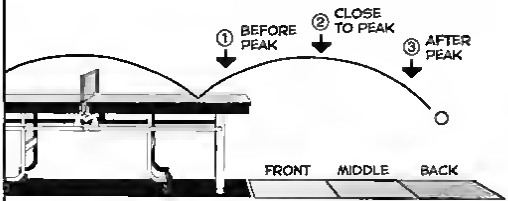
HO-
HOKUTOOOO!!
うさ耳卓球
うさ耳卓球
T-THAT'S JUST... I COULDN'T THINK OF ANYTHING ELSE I COULD DO FOR YOU SO..
THANK YOU, HOKUTO
THANK YOU FOR THE AMULET!
AND YOU GAVE ME SUCH A VALUABLE GIFT...
I'LL TREASURE IT!
I'M SORRY!
IT'S FINE, I DON'T MIND. ANYONE CAN BECOME A LITTLE SENSITIVE WHEN THEY'RE SICK. MORE IMPORTANTLY, ARE YOU FEELING BETTER?
HOKUTOO... I'M SO SORRY FOR SAYING THOSE THINGS TO YOU! I'M REALLY SORRY!
I'm
sorry!

...
YOU KNOW...
WHEN I SEE YOU PLAYING TABLE TENNIS SO FULL OF ENERGY, IT CHEERS ME UP TOO
THAT'S WHY IT'S SO FUN PLAYING WITH YOU.
I WANT THE TWO OF US TO STAY TOGETHER FOREVER
HANABI, FOR ME...
hoku
hoku
YOU ARE THE BEST FRIEND IN THE WORLD.

NO WAY! I'M NOT LETTING GO!
STOP IT! YOU'RE PRICKLING ME, DON'T STICK SO CLOSE!
HOKUTO! YOU'RE MY BEST FRIEND IN THE WORLD TOO!
FROM THAT DAY ON
I DON'T KNOW, BUT...
DID PLAYING TABLE TENNIS IMPROVE MY HEALTH? OR WAS IT THE POWER OF THE AMULET?
BY THE TIME I GOT TO MIDDLE SCHOOL, I WAS COMPLETELY FINE.
MY HEALTH SLOWLY STARTED TO GET BETTER.


I NEVER STOPPED LOVING TABLE TENNIS!!
BECAUSE HOKUTO WAS THERE FOR ME
BUT... ONE THING'S FOR SURE.

I AM STANDING HERE RIGHT NOW!
BECAUSE HOKUTO WAS THERE FOR ME
AGARI-SENPAI, IS THIS
SHE STEPPED NEAR THE TABLE!
THAT'S RIGHT. IT'S HANABI'S BEST PLAYING STYLE
CLOSE-DISTANCE HITTER!

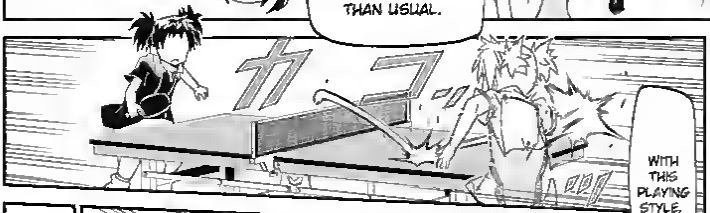


① CLOSE-DISTANCE HITTERS HIT HERE!

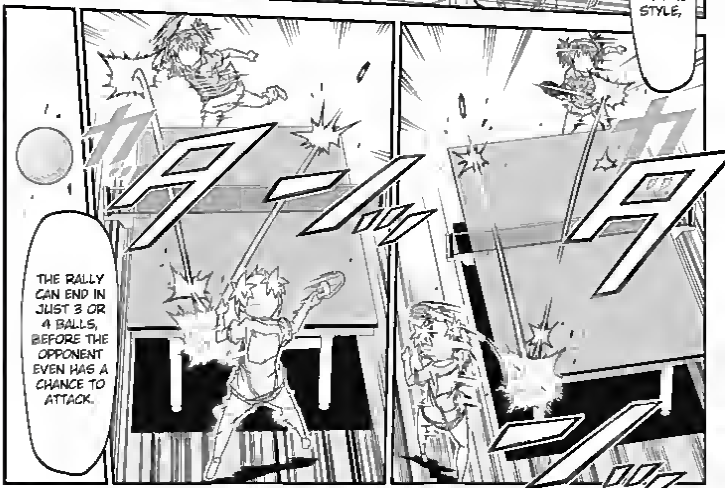
② DRIVERS GO HERE.

③ CHOPPERS PICK IT UP PRETTY LATE.

AT CLOSE-DISTANCE, YOU HIT THE BALL WHILE IT'S STILL RISING SO IT GOES BACK TO YOUR OPPONENT'S SIDE WAY FASTER THAN USUAL.



WITH THIS PLAYING STYLE,



THE RALLY CAN END IN JUST 3 OR 4 BALLS, BEFORE THE OPPONENT EVEN HAS A CHANCE TO ATTACK.

RATHER THAN STROKE POWER, IT FOCUSES ON THE SWIFTNESS OF THE RETURNS.
IT'S A GAME OF SPEED.
THEY GRAB THE INITIATIVE AND FORCE A QUICK DECISION OUT OF THE GAME, JUST BATTERING THEIR OPPONENT WITH DRIVES AND SMASHES.
BEING THIS OFFENSIVE, THE PLAYER NEEDS TO HAVE THE BOLDNESS TO TAKE SOME RISKS.
IT'S LIKE...
SO THE AMOUNT OF MISSES IS NATURALLY HIGHER.
BUT THIS STYLE ALSO REQUIRES VERY FAST REFLEXES,
(NEMURI) 4 - 7 (HANABI)

FIRING A BARRAGE OF BULLETS AT YOUR PREY
WITH A MACHINE GUN!!
ONCE YOU GET IT GOING,
THAT'S IT.
THERE'S NO WAY TO STOP IT.

FAST.
7 0 0 4
FAST.
FAST.
FAST.
FAST.
FAST.
FAST.
FAST.
FAST.
MY HEART WON'T STOP POUNDING FROM ALL THE SPEED!
AS ALWAYS, EVERY TIME I SEE HANA-CHAN PLAYING,
My playdads won't stop!
SHE'S FAST!!!
WHEN I LEARNED FROM HOKUTO ABOUT DIFFERENT PLAYING STYLES,
THE ONE THAT REALLY CLICKED WITH ME WAS THIS CLOSE-DISTANCE HITTER STYLE!

PLAYING LIKE THIS JUST FEELS SO GOOD!
BEING FASTER THAN ANYONE ELSE, LANDING POINTS WITHOUT EVEN GIVING THEM A CHANCE TO REACT,
AS A FRIEND, I RESPECT THAT FROM THE BOTTOM OF MY HEART.
I'm never saying that out loud though.
BECAUSE OF HER WEAK BODY, HER PHYSICAL CAPACITY WASN'T THAT HIGH.
TO BE HONEST, I DIDN'T THINK HANABI WAS FIT FOR THIS STYLE.
BUT HANABI DEVELOPED IT THIS FAR RELYING ON NOTHING MORE THAN A SINGLE FEELING: "IT'S FUN!"
I'M SURE I WOULD HAVE NEVER GOTTEN TO WHERE I AM.
BUT IF FUN WAS THE ONLY THING PUSHING ME FORWARD,

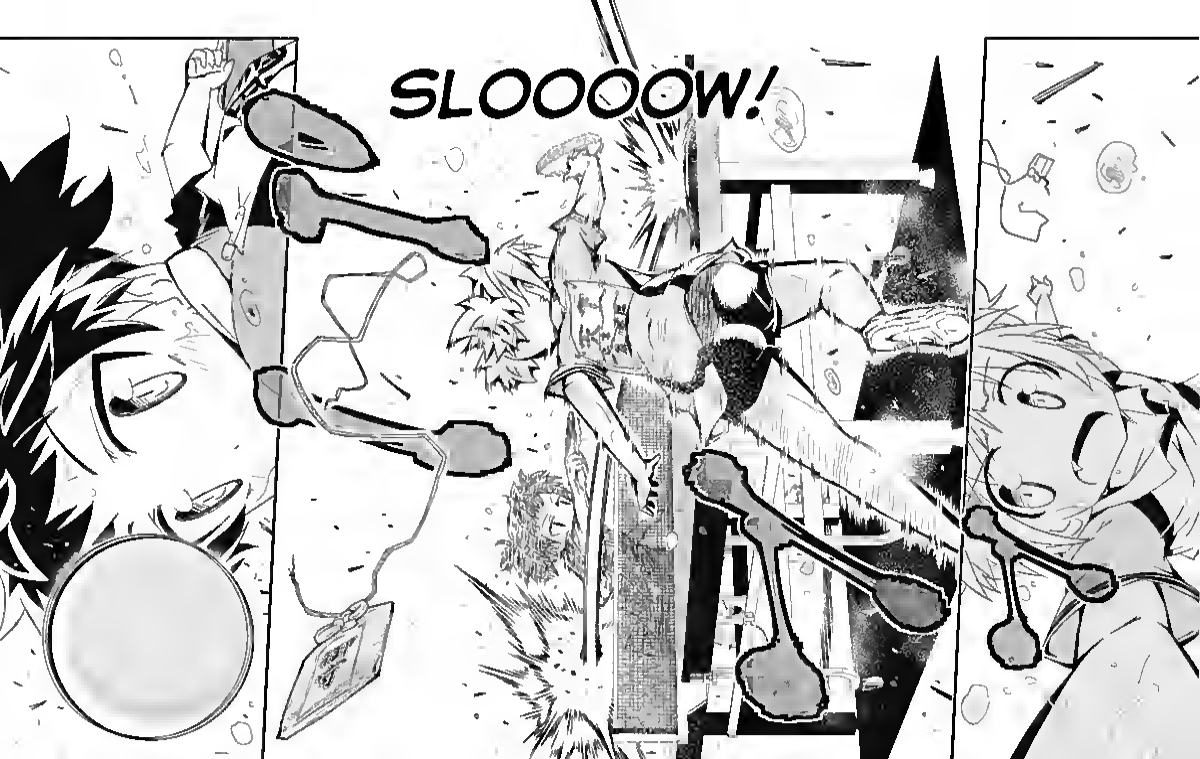
BECAUSE HOKUTO
WAS THERE.
HANABI, YOU'LL BE PLAYING THE FIRST MATCH AGAINST TSUBAME.
I'M GOING FIRST ?!
YOUR GAME IS THE MOST ENERGETIC HERE. I WANT YOU TO LIVEN UP THE TEAM WITH THAT ENERGY.
I'M COUNTING ON YOU!
I LOVE THE WAY YOU PLAY, HANABI.
SHOW US THAT CHEERFUL PLAYING ONLY YOU CAN DO.
BECAUSE I ALWAYS HAD HOKUTO'S AMULET ON ME
I WAS ABLE TO GIVE IT MY BEST.
I'LL SHOW YOU, EVERYONE!
JUST HOW FAST I CAN PLAY!
MY TABLE TENNIS WILL...

CHEER UP THE WHOLE TEAM!
?!
HANABI... WAS OUT-PLAYED?!
SHE... COUN-TERED?!

SO SHE FINALLY WOKE UP.
ABOUT TIME!
FINALS REALLY ARE ON A WHOLE OTHER LEVEL, HUH? WHO WOULD'VE THOUGHT I'D MEET SUCH A FAST PLAYER?
THAT SLEEPY-HEAD.
THANKS TO THAT MY EYES ARE WIDE OPEN NOW.
WHAT A COINCI-DENCE THOUGH,
I'M ALSO A CLOSE-DISTANCE HITTER LIKE YOU.
I'M PROBABLY ...
NOT ONLY THAT,

FASTER
THAN YOU.

SLOW.
SLOW.
SLOW.
SLOW.
SLOW.
SLOW.
SLOW.
SLOW.


SLOOOOW!

ポト"
御守
ねぇーぇっ
UNTIL THE REST OF THE GAME IS OVER,
GOOD NIGHT.

SINGLES 1
WINNER SAKIGAKE NEMURI
(TSUBAME GIRLS' ACADEMY)
6-11
GAME AND MATCH TO SAKIGAKE!!
10-12
HANABI O (8-11) 3 NEMURI
6-11

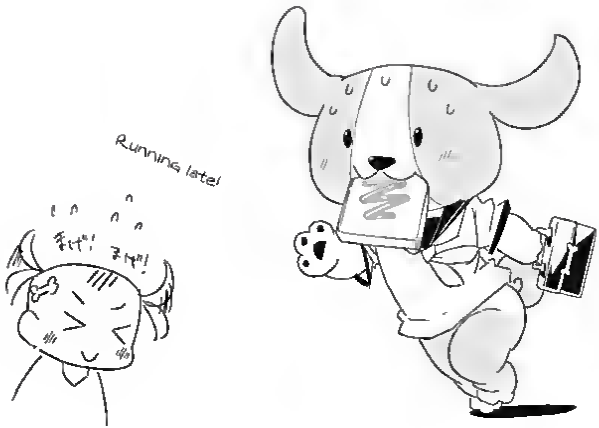
FIRST WIN!
YEAH!
W-WHY?
I.. LOST?
はあ
はあ
IT CAN'T BE...
THERE ARE PLENTY OF THINGS YOU COULD THINK OF, BUT...
キュ
DIFFERENCE IN TECHNIQUE,
DIFFERENCE IN AMOUNT OF PRACTICE,
THE MAIN REASON IS
DIFFERENCE IN RESOLVE, ISN'T IT?

YOU'RE THE KIND OF PERSON WHO EXPECTS SOME GOD TO DO YOUR WORK FOR YOU, AREN'T YOU?
THERE'S NO WAY WE'RE LOSING TO SOMEONE LIKE THAT.
NO...
IT'S NOT ABOUT ANY GOD!!
THAT'S NOT IT...
THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

I LOST.
SORRY, EVERY-ONE...
THERE'S NOTHING-
THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH THAT!
I'M SORRY.
IT WAS AN IMPORTANT MATCH TO LIFT EVERYONE'S SPIRITS

YOU PLAYED BRAVELY, HANABI,
AND YOU PLAYED WITH THE TEAM IN MIND
YOUR FEELINGS
REACHED US LOUD AND CLEAR.
SQUEEZE
SQUEEZE
SO DON'T WORRY
NOW, IT'S MY TURN
TO RESPOND TO THOSE FEELINGS!

...
OKAY...
I HAVE TO WIN
NO MATTER WHAT.
スルー
AND TO TAKE BACK
FOR THE TEAM,
HANABI'S SMILE!!
ほほ
しくし


Running late!
ずけ! ずけ!